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RELIGION AND LIFE.

S. RADHAKRISHNAN.

THE question which has come in for much discussion recently is about the ideal man. Is he a man of character or a man of action? More accurately, is he a man of piety or a man of the world? The two are considered incompatible. The mystics, the saints and the sages of any country have no interest in the affairs of the world. These religious souls are engrossed in their communion with the eternal and let go the whole world, in the impression "all's right with the world" for "God's in his heaven." They develop a sort of mystic, contemplative attitude which is mainly passive. They drink deep of the cup of religion and that seems to atrophy their practical sense and paralyse their motor energies. They feel suspicious of the strenuous activity of very ardent souls. Among the active workers of the world there does not seem to be any strong religious bias. The very name, man of the world, has come to signify one who is indisposed to religious sentiment or enthusiasm. A religious man of the world is an exception and not the rule. The deeply religious minds have no interest in mundane affairs; active public spirited citizens have no concern for their souls. Is one to face the alternative, either life without religion or religion without life? If there is no escape from this dilemma, religion will fall on evil days. Let us then ascertain, if this general tendency of cleavage between religion and life is an inevitable one. What is the significance of religion for life?

I.

The inadequacy of our experience both from the intellectual and the moral standpoint raises the problem of religion. We wish to know if there is anything else to supplement our empirical world. On the intellectual side

we have for our ideal of truth, a complete, harmonious and all comprehensive whole. The world of isolated facts, we come across, is, at best, finite and conditioned. It does not satisfy our ideal. Logic becomes a problem. On the moral side—and it is here that the incompleteness of our experience is *felt* by all men—it appears as a contrast between our soul's ideal and our actual will. Our soul presents us with a moral imperative which is felt by the individual as an imperious obligation which will brook no rival. It is a categorical imperative. It unconditionally asks us to do this, refrain from that. But our actual will contests its higher birth and pays homage to the temptations of sense. Not that the individual in his sober moments does not recognise the moral law to be right. As Socrates says, man has only to see the good to become desirous of it. But the lower self of man fights against the assertion of the moral law. When Augustine prayed "Give me chastity, but not yet" his higher self distinctly warned him to be pure but his lower self impelled him to indulge a little longer. Every seeker after righteousness will endorse St. Paul's words "The good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practise. I find then the law that, to me, who would do good, evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" The Indian mystic poet Tagore, in his own inimitable way describes the schism or anarchy within us:

"Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them.

"Freedom is all I want but to hope for it I feel ashamed.

"I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee and that thou art my best friend, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room.

"The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death. I hate it, yet hug it in love.

“My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.” (Tagore: *Gitanjali*, Song 28.) The consciousness of this struggle in the soul is the first step in the great spiritual awakening.

Again, there is always, on the part of our will, an effort to adjust itself to the ideal. In this struggle for adjustment, our efforts will lose all sense and significance, our life, its vitality and power, unless there is a higher life which is real. Without faith in the reality of the moral ideal life will be but a chapter of accidents. Like a ship without sail or rudder, it goes hither and thither. Man strives towards the ideal; wants to progress. He meets with opposition; he has to fight for the ideal. The conditions of the universe including the animal nature of his own organism, make it hard for him to attain the ideal. Man has to maintain his aspirations against a hostile universe. Sometimes, when he sees evil triumphant in the world, he loses all hope and despairs. The moral law which touches his heart breaks down. The galling injustice of the world strikes him with wonder and awful amazement. His voice trembles, his soul shudders and his heart breaks. Even the most fortunate, he finds, do not realise all they wish for. Finiteness, impotence, and failure are writ large on the face of history. With his heart torn by misery and distracted by life's contradictions, from out of the sphere of struggle, he looks up to heaven to catch glimpses that may make him less forlorn. What must I do to be saved? Who shall deliver me from this temptation? Is the moral ideal a dream and am I fighting only a sham fight against the tremendous forces of evil and wickedness? Or is it a reality that is ultimately bound to succeed in spite of all this big show of Satan and his forces? Am I helped in this fight and struggle by the powers of the universe or am I fighting only a losing battle? This is the problem of life with which every thinking soul is astir, at the start. For help in the pursuit of our moral ideals, we require a religion which shows that the demand

of the moral consciousness is a practicable one. This is why Voltaire says, even if there is no God, we have to invent one. Religion must give us the warrant that the moral case will succeed. Life is a battle. It involves a risk and as sensible men we crave for a working probability that all shall be well in the end. We have to realise that it is not a battle where we are foredoomed to defeat. It is one where we have a fair fighting chance of victory, where the forces for us are stronger than the forces against us. It is then, when religion dawns upon us, that we find life to be worth living and we array ourselves on the side of the spirit in opposition to the flesh.

Thus it is the contradictions of life that drive men to religion. Discontent with the actual gives rise to the religious problem. As Auguste Sabatier says, religion "is born in tears." It is the feeling of the incompleteness of the actual that is "the rent in the rock through which the life-giving waters flow." The problem of religion is an intensely practical one. It attempts to solve the enigma of life.

II.

In the solution of this problem of life which is the problem of religion, there is a transition stage which sometimes leads men astray. Life is said to be a contradiction and therefore unreal. The part of wisdom lies in forsaking it and seeking the real and the permanent within the subjective consciousness where we come into touch with a higher spiritual reality. The passive and humbled soul which finds life to be permeated through and through with paradox and misery turns inward and there the Divine voice speaks to him in unmistakable terms. He gets assurance through feeling and intuition that there is a spiritual element which is real and good. To catch the spirit of religion we have to turn away from the busy world. Immediately by a false turn in logic, the spiritual and the ideal is opposed to the human and the natural. The seeming sweetness of nature is but a show and all things mundane are unclean. "What

shadows we are and what shadows we pursue," if our vision is focussed on the actual and the human. The mystic shakes off the dust which is flesh and enters into the inner sanctuary of the soul and there lives a joyous life of light and gladness. Tearing himself away from life and work, he seeks pleasure in raptures and ecstasies of the subjective consciousness. Every great religion has passed through this stage. The Vedantic idealism, the Buddhist philosophy and the Christian thought all have experienced this spirit. I need not here dwell at length on the first two since, even to-day, they are considered to be pre-eminently other-worldly in spirit. The religion of Christ generally passes for a social and practical creed and we will show here how it is not all that it claims to be. Christ said, "If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." To obey the maxims of the New Testament would mean the collapse of civilisation. The precepts, resist not evil, turn the other cheek, represent an ideal impossible to human nature and inconsistent with the conditions of human society. Luthardt, the Leipsic theologian, feeling this difficulty of practising Christian virtues consistently with the duties of this world, is reported to have said that any attempt to maintain a social order on earth according to the doctrines of Christ (strictly interpreted) would be "the proclamation of anarchy." In the middle ages, Christians thought that the kingdom of God was not of this world. No transformation of existing conditions would do. The prevailing order of things was given over to satanic misrule and all thought of renovating the world from within was given up. They expected a change but it was not a gradual historical development to be achieved by the efforts of men but a sudden cataclysmic revolution to be achieved by a second supernatural coming of Christ. Christian ethics was then essentially eschatological. The Christian attitude to the world was one of uncompromising hostility. World's work never coincided with the service

of the supreme spirit. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and unto God the things that are God's."

But this attitude of aloofness from the world cannot be justified. Till we get back to life, we live in a region of abstractions. The life of the mystic who sees visions without applying them to life, is as much of an unreality as the life of the unreflective man who stumbles from one particular to another and who identifies his life and interests with those of his petty selfish ego. He will have principles but no facts to apply them to. The beauty of the inner life must shine through! How can the mystic who loves the larger self, live, without loving the particular expression of that larger self? Though it is not right for any individual to love his *own particular* self, still he has to love *a* particular, for it alone is the fitting embodiment of the universal which every one should love. Professor Bosanquet says "A particular is all important to each; but this particular is not his own particularity but another's; and moreover it is no longer to him a particular but takes on the value of a world. It is this that the desire of eternity really signifies." (*Individuality and Value*, page 23.) Therefore, it is of no use to withdraw into oneself and abstain from the activities of the world. Instead of solving the riddle of life, the mystics explain it away, and this is a defective attitude to life. The weakness of mysticism therefore lies in that it represents the essential element of religion as the sole and exhaustive expression thereof. To the mystic consciousness, religion seems to lie in an absorption into the universal being, consequent on the extirpation of the human *qua* human and extinction of the particular as such. This absorption into the universal is really a negative conception. It means simply giving up the ties of the world and rising above the petty cares of existence. In considering the human as an element opposed to the spiritual, it lays stress on transcendence at the expense of immanence.

Though the logic of mysticism is thus inconsistent, the problem was solved in the lives of the great mystics. Logic

has the trick of adapting itself to the push of circumstance, and practical beliefs do not travel on logical credentials alone. The great Buddha, when he found out the bliss of deliverance did not keep it to himself but communicated it to the world. "I am the perfect one, the Buddha. I have attained to peace. I have won Nirvana. I go now to the town of Benares to found the kingdom of righteousness. There will I beat life's drum in this world of darkness." Buddha's life shows, however deeply religious a soul might be, its religion must express itself in love. No man has a right to attain solitary salvation at the expense of his duties to others. The finest words ever spoken on this subject are those by Buddha. "Never will I seek or receive private individual salvation; never enter into final peace alone; but for ever and every where will I live and strive for the universal redemption of every creature throughout all worlds. Until all are delivered, never will I leave the sphere of sin, sorrow and struggle." Sri Krishna has so much the interests of the world at heart that he says "whenever there is a decay of religion, oh Bharata, and an ascendancy of irreligion then I manifest myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil doers, for the firm establishment of religion, I am born in every age." (*The Bhagavadgita* IV, 7-8.) "The son of man came eating and drinking." As a reaction against the externality of the Old Testament teaching, Christ laid stress on the inner core of conduct but from this it does not follow that the outer is to be destroyed or is contrary to the inner. The transcendental ideas of morality and religion became dynamic in Christ's life and conduct. With the abiding consciousness of the oneness in spirit and conduct, he lived in the world, though 'unspotted from the world.' Thus the abstract nature of mysticism, pure and simple, made itself manifest in the lives of the great religious leaders who have not been oblivious of their duties to the world. Greater mystics than Buddha, Christ, and Krishna we cannot think of; but more practical men there never were. With them all the word did not remain

word but became flesh. But if the mystic, without caring for the world wants to attain peace within himself, he is entirely selfseeking. Such a one represents, to use Mazzini's graphic expression, "the selfishness of genius." His soul contracts within itself, shrivels and dies. In the inner light the mystic should live and not perish; and life is action and not thought or feeling in and by itself.

But it may be asked, are not these religious leaders supporters of an ascetic code which requires man to give up his self? Yes; but they are not, so far as the present writer can follow them, supporters of quietism and inactivity. The asceticism which Buddha preaches demands the abolition of the evil tendencies of man. Says he "I preach asceticism inasmuch as I preach the burning away of all conditions of the heart that are evil. One who so does is a true ascetic." In a conversation with Sadhu Simha, he says "it is true, Simha, that I denounce activities; but only the activities that lead to the evil in thoughts, words and deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought and ignorance, not that of forgiveness, love, charity and truth." Sri Krishna says: "He who without depending on the fruits of action performs his bounden duty, he is a Sanyasin and a Yogin; not he who is without fire and without action." (*The Bhagavadgita* VI. I.)¹

Thus the sheer stress of facts and logic has driven the mystic consciousness to transcend itself. Mysticism is positive and should find expression in a world of beauty and love. Modern mystics and students of mysticism testify to it. Tagore says "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation." (*Gitanjali, Song 73*); Florence Nightingale believed "in the service of man being the service of God." "I care very little to express faith anywhere but in life" said Octavia Hill. Again "God has been always pleased to build His best bridges with human piers, not angels, not working by miracles; but He has always let us help

¹ See the author's paper on the Ethics of the Vedanta. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS, January, 1914.

Him if we will, never letting our faults impede His purposes when we struggled that they should not." Father Tyrrell in his posthumous work on "The Church and the Future" said that the religion to which he looked forward would consist of "mysticism and charity," in other words, love of God and love of man. According to Inge, mysticism may be defined as "the attempt to realise the presence of the Living God in the soul and in nature." (*Christian Mysticism*, page 5). Thus we see that the function of religion is not merely to pacify the troubled soul but make it enter with faith and hope into the work of God which is to make the earth the visible symbol of God's law.

III.

Life presented its contradictions and religion became a problem. Reality was sought in the purely subjective. The preceding paragraphs have disclosed how neither the purely subjective nor the purely transcendental is adequate to the solution of the problem of life. Here, as every where else, truth lies in a union of opposites. Immanent or objective idealism is the true solution of the riddle of existence. The ancient philosophy of the Vedanta, the idealistic systems of Germany and the conclusions of modern science, all point to objective idealism as the true solution. God is the self of the universe. He is my deeper self and yours. That famous text of the Chandogya Upanishad, which the vedantins are never tired of quoting sums up the chief points of objective idealism. "*Etadatmyam idam sarvam, tat satyam, sa atma, tat twam asi.*" (The whole universe is of the nature of That (Subtile essence). That is the true, That is atma. That art thou.) The whole universe is a living organism. There is nothing dead in it. It is one all-palpitating life. Doubt, sorrow and sin are all challenged by this new conception of religion. It gives us the conviction that evil, though not illusory, is transitory. Even death becomes a negligible incident in the ever widening process of the evolution of the spirit. "Nature red in tooth and claw" does not strike our atten-

tion; on the other hand we feel the quiet "smile of the universe." The essence of all religion lies in the conscious realisation of the presence of God, the tacit recognition that the human spirit is but a note in the eternal harmony of the world spirit. So long as the individual thinks himself to be a separate atom in this immense universe, so long as the feeling of isolation has him by the throat, so long as he has the idea that he is the chief actor in the stage, he is in the world of Maya, and he finds that the whole universe is working against him and his aspirations are dashed to pieces by the forces outside. From his separatist standpoint he looks upon nature as something opposed to human interests, as something to be overcome, something to be caught in the net of intelligence which man spreads. He finds to his cost that the external nature is too much for him. If he thinks he is swimming against it, he is worsted. But the fact is that the stream of the universe is flowing with him, he is swimming with the current as he is *in* it. When we recognise the essence of the finite to be in the Infinite, when we realise that we are parts of a stupendous whole, when we know that we are but the instruments of a nobler purpose, we get out of the world of Maya. When thus we adjust our perspective and feel that we are indissolubly a part of the grand scheme of things, our doubts are dissolved, our contradictions disappear and we are reconciled to life. In the struggle with the moral ideal, we know that victory is on our side; God dwells in us. His is a presence that never fails; His, an ideal that cannot be defeated. The discouraging task of moral effort and struggle is transfused into the precious possession and joyous privilege of maintaining spiritual relationship with God. We have the unalterable conviction that we do our work under the ray of heaven. There is a supreme power watching over our battles and bound to lead the righteous to the accomplishment of their goal. What a solace in our failures! Even if we don't succeed for a while, we need not lose heart. God will triumph in the end, our efforts may fail; the waves on the shore may be broken, but the Ocean con-

quers nevertheless. But if we lose the religious bond which binds us to a higher world our life becomes purposeless and illogical; if it holds us and sustains us, we feel we are working for a great end, a purpose not our own but yet in the highest and truest sense ours because it is God's. Such men to whom life is a divine enterprise, a mission dedicated to the service of the supreme spirit are the "soldiers of God on earth." Thus religion solves life's paradoxes.

It is the duty of every man to make the will of God prevail here below as it is above. The heavenly vision of unity, fellowship, fraternity or lokasamgraha in the expressive words of the Bhagavadgita, which we acquire during moments of reflection, should instead of producing lassitude and disgust, give strength to our moral sense and enable us to express ourselves in life so that our potential energies might become realised. This realisation can be effected only by means of a life of love and service. Why should we avoid life when even the supreme spirit "has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation"? (Tagore: *Gitanjali*, Song 11.) We have then a duty to discharge here on earth. No man can live for himself alone; for no man belongs to himself. He belongs to God and to humanity. He is an irreligious man who wraps himself up in his own self and interests himself in his own needs. The religious soul breaks the shell of egoism, finds itself in unison with the eternal and enlarges its consciousness so that it penetrates all the surrounding objects. This liberation from the trammels of the petty ego is the true liberation or moksha. *Unselfish conduct* is piety and its opposite sin. "A religious life which remains hidden in the individual consciousness, which does not create any spiritual solidarity, any fraternity of soul is as if it were not; it is a mere film of feeling, an ephemeral poetic flower which has no more effect on the individual himself than it has on the human race." In these words Sabatier lays his finger on the necessity of life for self-realisation. Our Rabindranath Tagore declares that "true freedom is not the freedom *from* action, but

freedom *in* it, which can only be attained in the work of love." (*Sadhana*, page 78.) We can realise the divinity within us not by the contemplation of the 'starry heavens above' or 'the moral law within' but only by entering into the stream of things and participating in the grand evolution of the spiritual life to the best of our ability. Man is gifted with the powers of life and activity not to throw them away but to place them at the altar of humanity's salvation.

Thus religion is supremely significant for life. It is the endeavour on the part of the individual to give practical expression to his view of the relation of the finite to the infinite. A religious life is one where the individual appropriates a share of spiritual life. Religion starts in the opposition which exists in human life, shows the way to overcome it and requires man to overcome it. In contemplation, we see the heavenly vision as 'through a glass darkly' and in action, by obeying it we have to realise it. In religion, to know is to do and to do is to know. Religion consists in the doing of God's will on earth as it is in heaven. Thus religion has both a practical aim and a practical foundation.

IV.

This organic relationship between the religious spirit and active life should, in no uncertain voice, be announced to the people of India who are labouring under a false impression. The question was once asked by the town clerk of Ephesus "What man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana?" Similarly it may be asked "what man is there that knoweth not how that India is a worshipper of the great goddess Spirituality?" The very atmosphere in India is charged with spirituality. The Indian people believe in a tradition that religion and life are incompatible. The blood of Janaka who exclaimed when his capital Mithila was destroyed by a conflagration "while Mithila is burning, nothing that is mine is

burnt" is running in their veins. How true is the poet who sang:

The East bow'd low before the blast
In patient, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again!

The people of India are mostly indifferent to the vital concerns of the world. They are prone to abstract meditation, and surrender themselves to the pleasures of the spirit. The tradition has been carried to such a height that according to the census of 1901, out of a population of 268 millions—Hindus and Mussulmen—in India proper, nearly three millions were numbered as ascetics and friars. These ascetics publicly renounce all ties of the world and retire into forests and caves to do penance and such other things. Scriptural injunctions require every Brahmin to retire from the world when he feels old age creeping on him. Sadhuism seems to be quite germane to the soil of India. Centuries before the advent of Christ or even Buddha, Sadhus had been flourishing in the sacred soil of India. A begging friar has come to be the ideal of India while Christendom is represented by the Christian statesman; shall we say shopkeeper?

Let me at once confess that India counted among its Sadhus some of the rarest and noblest souls of the world. Almost all her great religious reformers were recluses. To pronounce their names is of the nature of an act of worship; to read their lives is to be lifted up to the mountain top where we breathe freely the pure and bracing atmosphere; to have known them, what shall we say? It is "part of our life's unalterable good." They are the salt of the earth; they are the light and hope of the world. The heights of love, charity and devotion of these sages of India, it is doubtful, if ever they were scaled, under different suns or distant surroundings. The glory of their asceticism transcends the majesty of world empires. But it is presumption and folly to expect that we could have three millions of such men, even in a country like India.

Many of these are poor beggars who deceive the public by putting on the ascetic's garb. Grovelling in the dirt, wallowing in poverty, living on mendicancy they get on and when they die, the very trace of their existence is wiped out. But a large proportion of these three millions will be men of a fairly high degree of intelligence, a good deal of selfcontrol and a deeply religious bent. They could be of great service to India in her present transition. But even a stray visitor will be struck by the amazing and deplorable waste of energy which daily takes place in those veritable castles of indolence, otherwise known as monasteries and mutts where these ascetics lead a life of torpor and satisfied and dreamful ease. But they are not to blame. They are slaves to a superstition. They sincerely believe that strenuous life is opposed to spiritual perfection. Recently efforts were made to touch and quicken their slumbering conscience but not with much effect. The central Belur Mutt of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Mission has issued a manifesto which says "spirituality and not political aggrandisement had been the backbone of the Indian people in the past and on that inheritance, we should stand firm, with good will and love and peace to all on earth, if we are to become again a glorious nation in the future." How true and yet how false! It is this onesided spirituality which holds political progress to be at the opposite pole to itself that has worked so much mischief in India. Spirituality of the monastic type has not been able to prevent India's fall, has not been able to save her from the invader and the spoiler. Life is no sin; it is no discord. From the religious point of view, it is a harmony. Life looks a derangement only when cut off from the spiritual purpose it serves, but when reattached to it, it is sacred. Religion then stirs and stings the spiritual life and puts power into the arm of the good. From this standpoint, spiritual life does not mean fellowship with God exclusive of fellowship with man. All life is spiritual, through and through, from first to last. To pray for one's country is not opposed to religion; to bring about a union of spirit to spirit within

'the containing spirit of God' is not opposed to religion; to kindle a spark of divine love in the millions of hearts that lie so torpid and make them glow with the warmth of religion is not opposed to religion. The highest religion is love, fellowship and solidarity; it is to make all the Lord's people prophets. The spiritual energies which are pent up in the ascetics of India should be opened out into the regeneration of moral character and the bringing in of that social order which means perfection for all his brethren and not merely for himself. Let then the leisureliness and mysticism of the east give place to practical and social idealism. Let men who have no thought of self and who have good gifts and high talents place their powers at the altar of their country's good. Let them pour out their energies into the ideals and help the cause of progress.

Gladness be with thee, Helper of the world!
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad
And more glad until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind
And recommence at sorrow.

Here we are, individual expressions of the universal life, invited to the great feast of the evolution of the spirit. Why shrink from it? Let each man deliver his message from the infinite and realise himself.

It may be said that in our eagerness to emulate the activity of the west, we are exhorting the people of India, to cast to the winds her rich spiritual heritage. We do not hold up the ideal of work in any philistine spirit or in blind imitation of the west. We have already given reasons for our view that public spirit is the fulfilment of divine law. We have our eyes wide open and see that the civilisation of the west, which seems to consider the world to be not a place where souls are built but a thing to be bought and sold, is soulless. It is like a whited sepulchre with dead bones in it. The west lacks the spirit to lift her out of the sordid materialism in which she is sunk and which is eating out her very vitals. It is this spirit which ought

to vivify and interpret matter. But India is at the opposite extreme. To her we say let your spirituality express itself in the world of facts and action. The goal for both is conscious purposive self expression or self realisation. India is now standing on the verge of a national renaissance. In this struggle for enlightenment and progress, it is the duty of her beautiful souls to come down to earth with their visions of heaven, participate in the struggle and give encouragement and sympathy to those who are working in the cause of the right. It is their share to shed sunshine on the path, strengthen failing courage, lighten sorrows, instil faith in hours of despair and lead India to her goal by the path of righteousness which alone exalteth a nation.

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